

Policy Brief for the MDG Summit 2010 Side Event:

## **Localizing Millennium Development Goal 7: Key to Success**

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# Localizing Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensuring environmental sustainability with meaningful targets

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## The Environment and the MDGs

There is clear acknowledgement in reports by UNDP, the World Bank, UNEP, and other MDG partners that the success in achieving the MDGs by 2015 relies heavily upon MDG 7, *Ensuring Environmental Sustainability*. Despite this apparent awareness of the critical role of the environment in sustainable development, progress with MDG 7 has proven to be particularly challenging. This raises questions as to MDG 7's general language, whether its global targets and indicators fully capture the goal itself, the lack of benchmarks, and its failure to provide guidance for action.

The shortcomings of MDG 7 raise two primary concerns. First, that MDG 7 could be deemed "not attained" if nations are unable to adequately assess their environmental activities in a way that relates to the targets. Second, if it is deemed "attained" or moving toward progress without measuring critical indicators of environmental health in a way that reflects local changes, then the long-term success of MDG 7 will be undermined along with all the other MDGs. MDG 7 must immediately be given a higher priority as we near the 2015 deadline and beyond. Critical in this effort is to provide greater guidance for nations to adapt MDG 7 targets to measurable benchmarks at the national level, monitor environmental indicators at meaningful scales, and set locally relevant targets that emphasize the management of ecosystem services as a means to enhance livelihoods. These changes will not only support the operationalization of MDG 7, but also enable the goal to better reflect real changes to the environment.

## Realigning MDG 7 to meet national needs

There is an increasing recognition that because of the challenges of monitoring MDG 7 indicators, strategies to evaluate progress towards this goal must be rethought. A number of countries have taken this on and have realigned their national targets to be more relevant for MDG 7. Of the 158 countries that submitted Millennium Development Goals Reports in 2005, 85 (54%) of them had adapted MDG targets to be more reflective of site-specific environmental issues and aligned to national development plans. Gambia for example declared that their target for Indicator 25: Forest Cover would be to maintain at least 30% of land area under forest cover and bring at least 75% of that area under management between 2000-2010. Other countries could learn from those that have already made changes to rethink and adapt their national targets and also indicators so they are more relevant for their situation.

## Adapting MDG 7 to local conditions

In adapting targets and indicators at the national or regional level it is critical to address the challenges of monitoring progress in a

way that reflect the needs of those most directly reliant on ecosystem services and results in environmental activities at a meaningful scale. Since many ecosystem services are managed at a local scale, from the household or farm to the landscapes, it is critical that indicators can be monitored cost-effectively, are understood, and are relevant to individuals and communities.

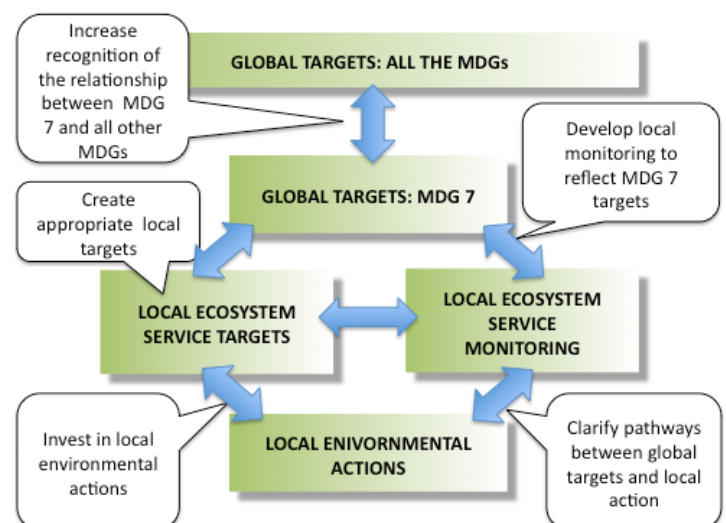
### Examples of Local Ecosystem Service Targets:

- Meet fuelwood and timber needs without further loss of forest
- Maintain soil productivity by halving the amount of managed land without soil conservation practices
- Maintain water quality by increasing vegetative cover from <15% to >40% for a majority of the year

## Developing local targets, monitoring strategies, and action

Targets must be localized by identifying locally important ecosystem services and the major threats to those services. To be effective these targets must be selected through a participatory process so they address highly variable local needs in a way that can be scaled to provide data relevant to national targets and MDG 7. There are a number of approaches that have been employed to do this such as the Landscape Measures Initiative (LMI)<sup>1</sup>. The LMI creates a framework for multiple stakeholders to better understand ecosystem services and how to manage potential synergies and tradeoffs to improve livelihoods. This process enables stakeholders to develop locally relevant and widely accepted targets. The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) offers an example of how targets generated at the local level can then be monitored effectively, and result in action<sup>2</sup>. For example in the MVP, monitoring the number of trees grown and planted

*Figure 1. There is an interdependent relationship between global targets for all the MDGs, MDG 7 and local ecosystem service management, monitoring and environmental actions. This relationship must be better recognized and acted on in a number of critical areas.*



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ecoagriculture.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.millenniumvillages.org/>

coupled with fuelwood use surveys and remote sensing analysis of deforestation rates will enable the development of realistic local targets that will help structure reforestation activities. These data can then be used to inform national MDG 7 targets related to forests, energy use and carbon dioxide emissions. A clear strategy however, must be developed to aggregate local scale data so that it can be used effectively to inform national scale targets.

### Investing in the environment

If targets, monitoring and action appropriate for a local scale are to be implemented a significant increase in national and international investment will be required. Although few reliable statistics exist on environmental investment, evidence suggests that despite major international commitments, funding specifically for the environment could be less than 8% of global bilateral aid<sup>3</sup>. For example the MVP currently invests 3% in the environmental sector directly and an additional 8% for improved sanitation and drinking water. Greater investment in environmental monitoring and actions are clearly needed as are reliable mechanisms for tracking changes in funding.

In addition to increased national and international investments for the environment, institutional changes must be made to enable income generating activities that simultaneously support conservation of natural resources, such as payment for ecosystem services (PES), and bring significant private investment. It was recently estimated that carbon markets could benefit 25–50 million low-income households in developing countries, markets for biodiversity conservation could benefit 10–15 million, and markets for watershed protection could benefit 80–100 million, and markets for landscape beauty and recreation could benefit 5–8 million by 2030<sup>4</sup>. Key enabling factors that will be necessary for many of these mechanisms to reach their potential contribution to poverty alleviation include binding commitments by the international community with respect to global agreements such as the Convention on Biodiversity or the Copenhagen Accord.

Many of the challenges associated with MDG 7 have been highlighted in the past, and recommendations for increased monitoring, embedding existing indicators, and adaptive management are not new. The emphasis on local efforts through increased



The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) serves as a proof of concept that by investing a modest amount of resources to provide a comprehensive package of interventions, progress can be made on all of the MDGs. To ensure environmental sustainability the project works with community members to manage their farms, businesses and landscape in ways that promote more trees, biodiversity and carbon storage; improve the fertility, organic matter content, water infiltration and storage capacity of soils; protect streams and rivers; stabilize slopes; and develop renewable energy supplies. Actions are also taken to ensure that large-scale land use and management changes required to meet the other MDGs are implemented in ways that minimize damage to natural ecosystems. The MVP recognizes that preserving the environment is key to long-term sustainable growth, but the MDG 7 global indicators do not serve as a sufficient guide to meet environmental objectives. There is a need to find better ways to link village level interventions and data to regional and national scales to ensure the most accurate MDG reporting.

monitoring, adaptation to measurable indicators, along with bi-directional communication within countries is one strategy to begin to more directly address limitations highlighted here. Localizing MDG 7 means setting relevant targets at small scales and connecting them to national and global goals. This is necessary to obtain an accurate picture of the state of the environment at the forefront of the development landscape.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts, T., Parks, B., Tierney, M. and Hicks, R. 2009. Has Foreign Aid Been Greened? *Environment Magazine*. Jan/Feb.

<sup>4</sup> Milder, J. C., S. J. Scherr, and C. Bracer. 2010. Trends and future potential of payment for ecosystem services to alleviate rural poverty in developing countries. *Ecology and Society* 15(2): 4. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol15/iss2/art4/>

## Summary of Recommendations/Action Items

**To ensure that the MDGs are truly met by 2015 and beyond, there needs to be immediate action to:**

- Reset priorities to bring MDG 7 to the forefront
- Provide nations with guidance on how to adapt MDG 7 targets to align with their own development priorities and aggregate locally collected indicators
- Promote participatory development of localized ecosystem service targets and indicators
- Invest in rural ecosystem services management as a means to improve livelihoods, and create mechanisms to effectively track environmental funding

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